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ABSTRACT

The function of games in a society is discussed in this paper. An earlier definition of games as a concretistic way of processing information of cultural antitheses is enlarged to include a more bio-adaptive definition: the game is also a socialization of conflict. This view is compared and contrasted with those of Sigmund Freud and G. H. Mead. Further discussion presents some possible classificatory alternatives of games and a cross-cultural array of games which constitute basic developmental and cultural forms of cooperation and conflict. Antitheses to be socialized include Order and Anarchy; after their capacity is established, two broad groupings of games can be defined. The Approach-Avoidance grouping and its subgrouping involves direct relationships with other persons. A parallelistic relation to others and a preoccupation with working against certain external obstacles is present in the Success-Failure grouping. The conclusion focuses on the implications of this analysis of games for sports and aggression. (SDH)

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Games, the Socialization of Conflict*

Elsewhere I have developed the thesis that play should be thought of as an adaptive process having to do with the mediation of novelty. It is constituted by idiosyncratic reactions to experience and develops in the players a repertoire of responses of potential rehearsal value for novel contingencies. Although the play process appears to be universal, it is only minimally developed in those cultures where children are early inducted into the world of work, and where survival stringencies are such that there is little need for variable repertoires. In the modern world, by contrast, where there are ever changing requirements of adult roles, there has been an enormous expansion of the play process. More children today create model worlds, indulge imaginary companions and act out flexible sociodramas than was ever envisaged for children throughout most of human history.

Within this framework for play, games represent a more limited adaptive process in which this play variation is entrapped to serve certain restricted social ends. For example, in a culture in which it is important to learn the antithetical relations of pursuit and escape because some animals and some men must be pursued and some animals and some men must be eluded, children cannot be left to discover such things in the state of nature. Too few of them would survive. A game, on the other hand is like a primitive school. It abstracts the essential issue from its customary and often dangerous contingencies and presents it in an enactive form for the player's comprehension. Confronted by the issue and by the other players, the subject learns increasingly to vary his own play to maximize outcomes. The loose structure of games encourages individual variability in the service of a more adequate antithesis (better searching and better evasion). In these terms the game is an information model and gaming is a concretistic way of processing information.

But as the above example suggests, and as it will be argued here, games seem most focused on processing information about how to act within an antithetical framework. How to chase or escape, hide or seek, attack or defend, capture or rescue, accept or reject, cohere or dissolve, construct or destruct, win or lose. For these reasons, it may be legitimate to say that games encapsulate play variability to serve such systems of cultural antithesis. In earlier cross-cultural research Roberts and I found that types of games vary in distribution across the world and

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that where they exist they are often to be found significantly correlated with conflict in child training procedures as well as with linkages to adult cultural customs. Thus, we found that where girls played games of chasing and escape (going in and out of safe bases), there was evidence of conflict in independence training (they were given both rewards and punishment for showing territorial independence), and of the requirement that these same girls should leave home and marry outside their own territorial group into another household. From these results it is possible to add to our earlier epistemic definition (that the game is a concretistic way of processing information about cultural antitheses) the more bio-adaptive definition that the game is also a socialization of conflict. Which is to say that given basic conflicts or crises with which a group must deal, these come to be represented in the antithetical structure of games, so that the player's idiosyncratic variability can be programmed towards the management of that conflict. There then results, probabilistically, the enculturative outcome that after many years of gaming, the players ultimately become persons with wide repertoires of adaptive skills appropriate to the antitheses dealt with in the games, and potentially relevant to the matters of crisis that concern the larger culture, for example, again, the realistic pursuit and avoidance of some men and some animals. Novel skills developed through games not only have such individual value, they also help to resolve for the group the issues of hierarchical power. A long term result of playing is considerable group information on potentials for group cohesion and leadership.

This view of games is consistent with the FREUDian view although the emphasis there was somewhat more on the personal conflict and personal tension reduction values of game socialization. Here the emphasis is more on the general and benevolent value of conflicts that lead on into useful forms of cultural learning. In a contrary way this present view is also consistent with the role rehearsal emphasis of G. H. MEAD and others, though unlike MEAD the stress is on the critical character of the antitheses at the heart of games, not just upon the cognitive reciprocities to be gained from game playing. In this present synthesis of FREUDian and MEADian views, however, social development and social life is seen as involving inevitable conflict. Most relationships involve not only mutual bonding but also mutual alienation at one level or another, and this is the normative state of affairs not an aberrant one. In a sense, the basic conflicts which remain static and unresolvable (apart from psychopathology) in everyday transactions, in games become transformed into dynamic interaction. Deceits and strategems, bribes and simulations that usually deny the normative mask of society, take their place as full partners in the inverted society of games. They become part of the developed repertoire of the players.

In sum the present view of games is that primarily gaming is first and foremost an epistemic process. It is a process of abstracting and comprehending cultural

crises by casting them in the form of ludic antitheses. Furthermore, the inherent attraction in this symbolization lies in the opportunities for indulgence of these antitheses in manners usually unobtainable outside of the games. Whether or not such a gaming process comes into existence, however, will itself be dependent on the larger cultural setting and the need to socialize members with respect to recurrent crises. Thus games socialize conflicts. For which reason we have chosen to define games structurally as that play form in which there is an opposition of forces for the purpose of an uncertain outcome.

In earlier work ROBERTS and I chose to define games only in terms of their outcome determinants, whether outcomes were determined by chance, strategy or skill. Games are sufficiently complex that many other classificatory alternatives are also available; one can concentrate on the organization of the players, the character of the performances, the arrangements of space and time. The reason for the present emphasis on the ludic antitheses as the key to the rest of the fabric are multiple, having to do with the above stated assumptions about the role of conflict in social life, as well as our previous successful discoveries of the role of conflict in games when studied cross-culturally. Beyond that, the decision is heuristic and worth pursuing to see how far it will take us.

If one pursues this line of thought, then it is possible to examine the cross-cultural array of games and to ask what conflicts they mirror. In our earlier studies ROBERTS and I found that the competitive games of physical skill, strategy and chance were not universal. The particular conflicts over winning and losing in these modalities did not seem to be a concern of all mankind. In fact, at first it seemed as if there were cultures without games at all. But that turned out to be true only if games were defined as we had defined them at that time, as having rules, sides, outcomes, and winners. In subsequent studies I have been impressed with the apparently universal character of those phenomena usually called pastimes, diversions, entertainments or amusements. Unlike competitive games there are few contests and few winners. The games involve player co-operation and the sharing of mutual movements, songs, rhymes and exultations. If there is contest or testing it is generally between the players and external physical conditions, or between the players and the internal psychological or social character of their own group life in its more customary forms. In these games the players either impose order on their condition or they allow disorder to reign within clearly circumscribed limits. Either extreme may be considered a celebration by imitation or by mockery of the ordinary state of the group's coherence.

In several recent fairly complete game collections which I have reviewed involving the games of the Australian aborigine, of Melanesia and of Polynesia (brought together by students in the Physical Education Faculty at the University of Alberta, Canada), at least a third to a half of all the games have been of this sort. At the most elementary level they are games like Ring a Roses where all colla-

borate and dance around in unison singing the words, then at the end all collapse in disorder on the ground. At a higher level they are like the turn taking games of jump rope, in which each watches the others skill, and then takes their place when they fail. Or as in the eskimo game of Kaivaluk where each child is spun in turn on a block of ice, until too dizzy to continue and another takes her place. In his study of eskimo games, GLASSFORD (1970) found that about two-thirds of their games were of this turn taking self-testing variety. At a still higher level there are games like Consequences, in which each person contributes one written line to evolving stories about a fictitious person, the papers continue around the circle until all have been one complete circle and are finally read out loud for their hilarious content. The co-operative process breaks down into merriment and disorder.

I have given this much attention to these activities because they seem to me to constitute the most basic type of games both developmentally and culturally. They provide the original forms of co-operation and conflict without which more competitive games cannot proceed. On the developmental level we know that children under the age of five years have considerable difficulty in co-ordinating their efforts towards a common goal, although from the age of approximately three years onwards they are most interested in so doing. Their own arbitrary exercise of power over others, their constant claim of central roles, their refusal to reverse superior and inferior roles and their egocentric threats, bribes and appeals (as Susan ISAACS has put it), makes such collaboration difficult. In this predicament the existence of games of the simple orderly unison type appears to contribute to the transcendence of these difficulties through their relatively tight organization, and the simplicity and maximal modelling by other children of the behaviors to be followed. To one witnessing children at these games there is a sudden and marked contrast with the usually much lower level of their interactional play. They appear to have suddenly transcended chaos with order. If the desire for order (or rather the conflict between order and anarchy) is a major motive behind these games, then we might expect them to be of particular importance to groups where survival depends upon tight group cohesion. The evidence from two such groups, the Australian aborigine and the Canadian eskimo is highly supportive. Writing of the aborigine SALTER says: "In most areas victory in a game was of minor importance and only rarely was any form of trophy awarded to the winner. Participation was close to maximum in that all who wished to participate were welcomed. Although a certain amount of skill was desireable for most games, the lack of emphasis on winning permitted the less skilful to participate in and enjoy the activity. Game rules were few and simple enough to be understood by players of all ages. The attitude of the players was such that the majority of games was played without an official. A large percentage of the games were of a group nature rather than of a team type. Thus while

competition was present it did not dominate play. Play activities were used to solidify internal relationships and promote goodwill and social intercourse externally" (1967, 191).

If a game must have rules, sides, outcomes and winners, then most of the pastimes of mankind are not games. But if a game is defined more simply as having rules, and opposition of forces and an uncertain outcome, then these group activities constitute games just as much as do the peek-a-boo exercises of mother and infant. In these games the opposition is between order and disorder, altruism and egoism, control and impulse. The players try to maintain order against their own underlying desire to laugh out loud, or to disrupt the proceedings, or the individual tries to keep his skill performance going against the odds that he will collapse and be ridiculous. The virtue of this more general definition of games is that it will include most of the commonsense and widespread uses that people give to the term. Originally, for example, it did not make much sense to think of the book "The Games People Play" (by Eric BERNE) as dealing with games in terms of more sophisticated game definitions. But as an opposition of forces, governed by certain implicit rules, with uncertain outcomes, BERNE's cyclical "games' of lovers and of spouses, certainly fits the definition, and allies modern looser usage with the more generic gaming habits of mankind.

In this paper I do not have space for an extended treatment of the other groupings of ludic antitheses with which we are all more familiar, and which I would maintain, require for their practice basic skill in the games of order just described. Nor do I have space for my contention that within each ludic antithesis there is a developmental order of succeeding games, each structurally dependent upon the level preceeding it, though I have given some examples of these elsewhere (SUTTON-SMITH, 1971). Briefly, however, the other antitheses to be socialized in games are as follows:

Order-Anarchy

Approach-Avoidance			*Success-Failure*	
accept	pursue	attack	preparedness	accumulate
-reject	-escape	-defend	-unpreparedness	-deprive

After the establishment of capacity for order and anarchy, there are two broad groupings, the first having to do with direct relationships to other persons (approach-avoidance) and the other having to do with parallelistic relation to others where there is a preoccupation with working against certain external obstacles (success-failure). Within each broad grouping there are several sub-types. Games of acceptance and rejection tend to be played more often by females. At the most elementary level they involve being selected to perform in the centre of the circle (Punchinello), at later ages being selected to be the one in charge (Mother May I), still later being selected by chance to kiss or be kissed (Spin the Bottle and Flashlight). They seem to be related to the traditional female's con-

flict about whether she indeed will or will not be chosen in love. Games of pursuit and escape have to do, as we have already mentioned, with the fears of strangers and the dangers of being independent. Games of attack and defend are clearly related to cultural needs for military capability, whether manifested through strategy or physical force. Roberts and I showed earlier that games of strategy concur with the existence of military forces cross-culturally. The terms preparedness and unpreparedness stand for all those skill games, where individuals are pitted against each other but on some independent terrain as in most classic Olympic events. Examination of tribal cultures suggests that a great deal of this type of game activity has to do with staying in a state of preparedness for hunting or for combat. Games of accumulation and deprivation are games of chance and are here named this way because of our cross-cultural finding that they co-exist with conditions of economic uncertainty. Psychoanalytic emphases similarly suggest, on an individual level, a concern over basic oral supplies.

Implication for Sports and Aggression

This analysis of games makes it difficult to support the view that the major function of games is to socialize aggression, that is, unless the term aggression be used in some very primal and unparsimonious manner. Only one group of games as here analyzed are directly concerned with the traditional aggressive activities of attack and defense, and these are not, as we have argued, the most basic type of game. Nor does it make much sense on this analysis to say, as some comparative psychologists have, that games are the human equivalent of animal fighting. Only some games fulfil the requirements. Perhaps the problem lies in the rather overgeneralized way in which the notion of aggression tends to be used in thinking about games and sports. Most human activity is structured towards particular ends, quite other than the control of aggression. The very real matters of whether you are accepted or rejected, whether you can approach strangers or should avoid them, whether you are sufficiently skilled to survive, whether you will be lucky in your decisions are vital matters on the human scene which appear much more relevant to games, than the notion of aggression. It would be my guess that sportsmen and their spectators are similarly involved with a variety of human conflicts, conflicts which ever press towards the simplifications (the inversions of emphasis) permitted by games and sports, simplifications which are seldom desireable in the normative course of society. These simplified outcomes are, however, to be occasionally found in the normative course of events and cultural participants must stand in eternal readiness.

Background references for this article will be found in: E. Avedon & B. Sutton-Smith, The Study of Games, New York 1971; R. Herron & B. Sutton-Smith, Child's Play, New York 1971; or B. Sutton-Smith, The Folkgames of Children, University of Texas, 1973.

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